

Desemantized Writing In The Journals Of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs

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Everything Lost

The Latin American Notebook of William S. Burroughs, Revised Edition

William S. Burroughs

Edited by Geoffrey D. Smith, John M. Bennett, and Oliver Harris

180 pp. 7 x 9

102 Facsimile pages

Paperback Pub Date: May 4, 2017

from The Ohio State University Press website:

"In late summer 1953, as he returned to Mexico City after a seven month expedition through the jungles of Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, William Burroughs began a notebook of final reflections on his four years in Latin America."

Indian Journals

by Allen Ginsberg

Publisher: Grove Press

Publish Date: 08/13/1996

Dimensions: 8.27" L, 5.50" W, 0.67" H

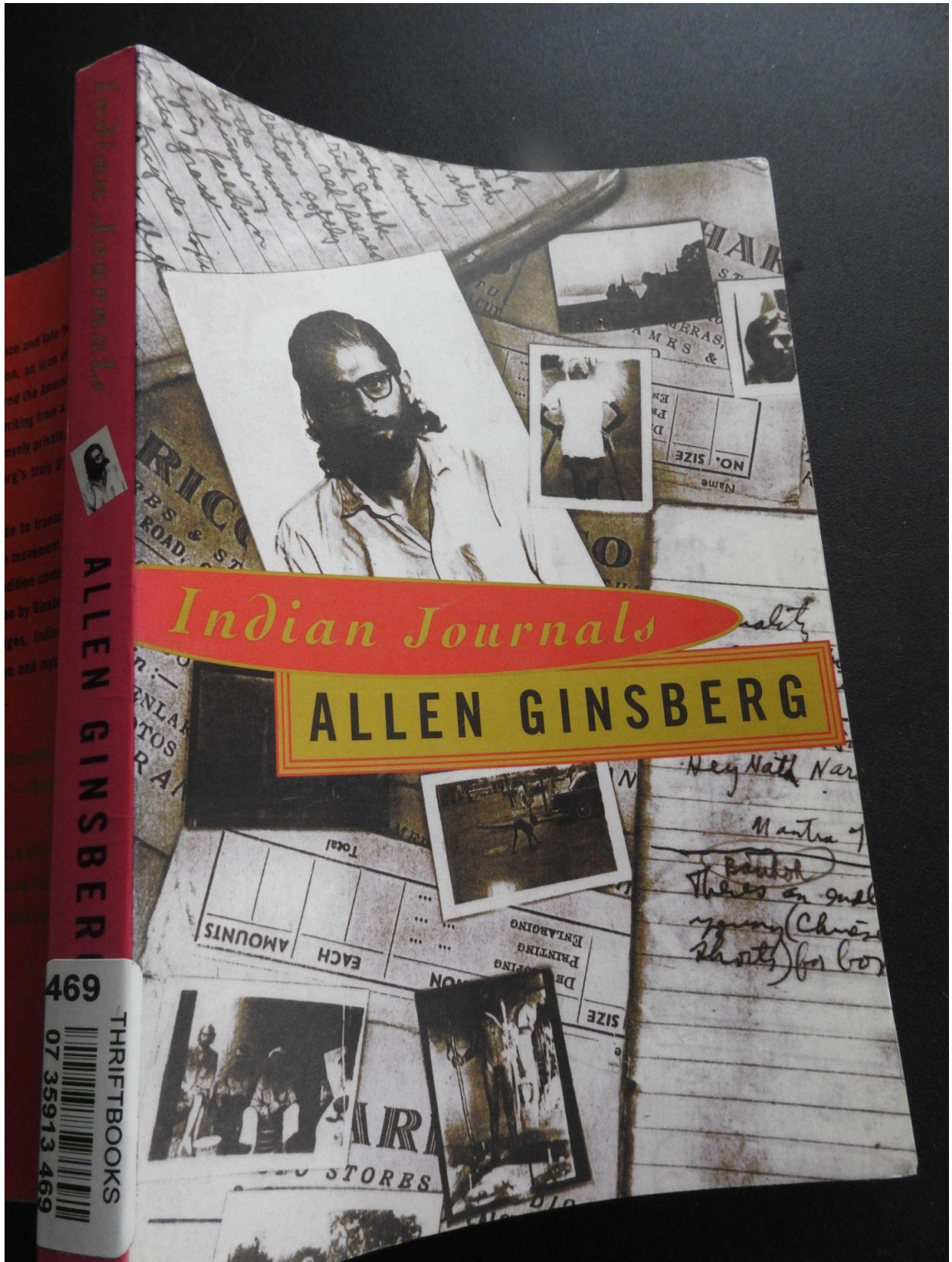
Originally published in 1970, Indian Journals collects Ginsberg's writing from a 1962-63 stay in India.

The Ginsberg poem moves from a variety of traditional stanzaic verse, to desemantized handwriting, to textual visual poetry (page-as-field composition, as in the work of Charles Olson), and back to stanzaic verse. Here is a poet thinking, in formal structures about formal structures, and showing his decisions as they are made, as the decision-making shapes the poem. It should be taught by all teachers of poetry everywhere, at every level, as an example of how reading a poem participates intimately in the process of writing poetry.

One thing to note, explicitly, in the desemantized section of the poem, is its insistent refusal to succumb to the allure of beautiful penmanship. The desemantized handwriting is about the disintegration of the letterforms. The loss, perhaps intentional loss, of coherent semantic potential at the letteral and subletteral levels is harsh and ugly, similar in that respect to much theater of the absurd writing as it emerged from the damaged existential psyche in the years following WWII.

The desemantized handwriting in the Burroughs journal is precisely the failure of writing to keep up with thinking, and it is simultaneously the continuation of a writing beyond the point at which language can no longer keep up with thinking. It is a record of a human mind as it experiences the limits of its ability to understand and express just what it means -- what it is -- to be a human being in the world in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Once again, as in the Ginsberg poem, no concessions are made to the aesthetic expressivity of quasi-calligraphic drawing. The desemantized pages in *Everything Lost* are writing, the writing of writing's failure, the limits of language given to the reader as a disaster of experiential reality.



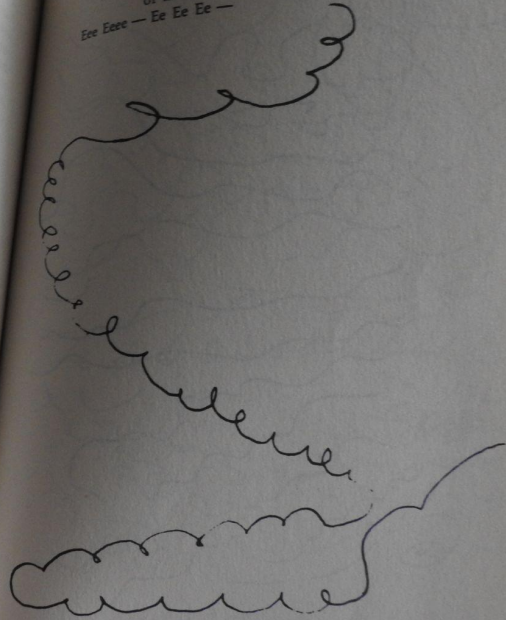
Jan 28, 1963 —
Dismal America

SARASWATI'S BIRTHDAY

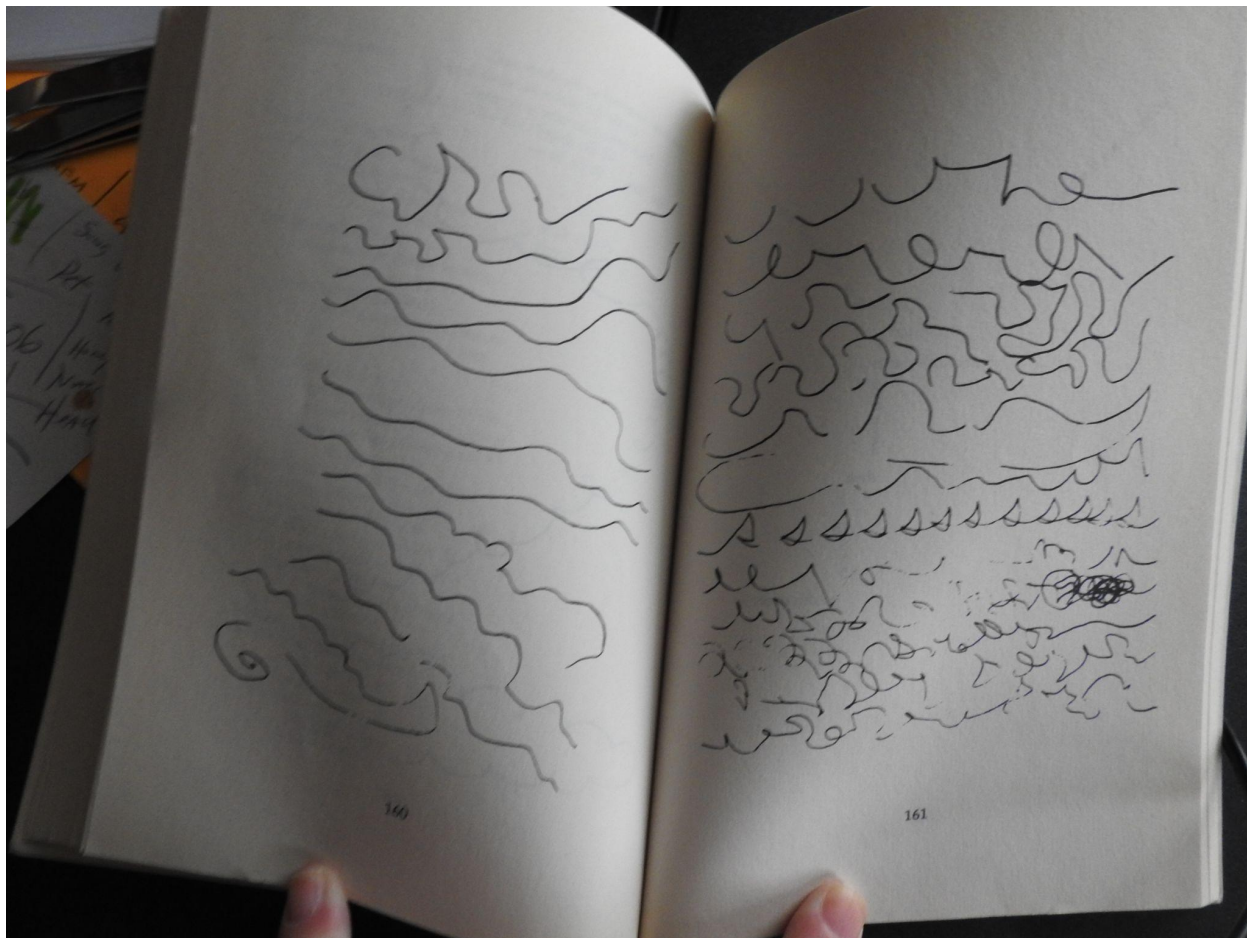
Jai Guru Jai Sarawati
at the altar in the white room
Prasad in leaf cups
orange slice, cherry-yellow, milk sweets,
hard sweet rice, Guava Slices,
The carpeted roof top
Squatters & Sitters leaning
into the wavy music
under the orange canopy
by the night trees Ganges
waterfront street
Springtime's fifth day —
The — quavering voices of the
young singers in blue jackets
leaning together groaning out of
chest & belly
ohohoheao — oo oo — Jai Guru
Flowers resting yellow and green
buds over the flat fields
The Saddhu's tree trunk altar
creation cock with flowers
mouthfuls of pea buds
green softness of taste
sweet saliva —
Mustard plants & wheat ripening
Across the river from Ramnagar
by slow poled boat
on blue seeming water —
Skeletal boatman turbaned
on head & loins
hollow armed

158

one arima received at the shore stall
under the umbrella, sleek lazy
Man-concessionaire acceptant
of the angry coin —
Eee Eeee — Ee Ee Ee —



159



Coming down the stairs

step by
step down —

Trilochan's pants

seen down
thru

the doorway

to the street —

A continuous descent thru miles
of space

floating freely

rising

after awhile

and

walking across a tightrope high over

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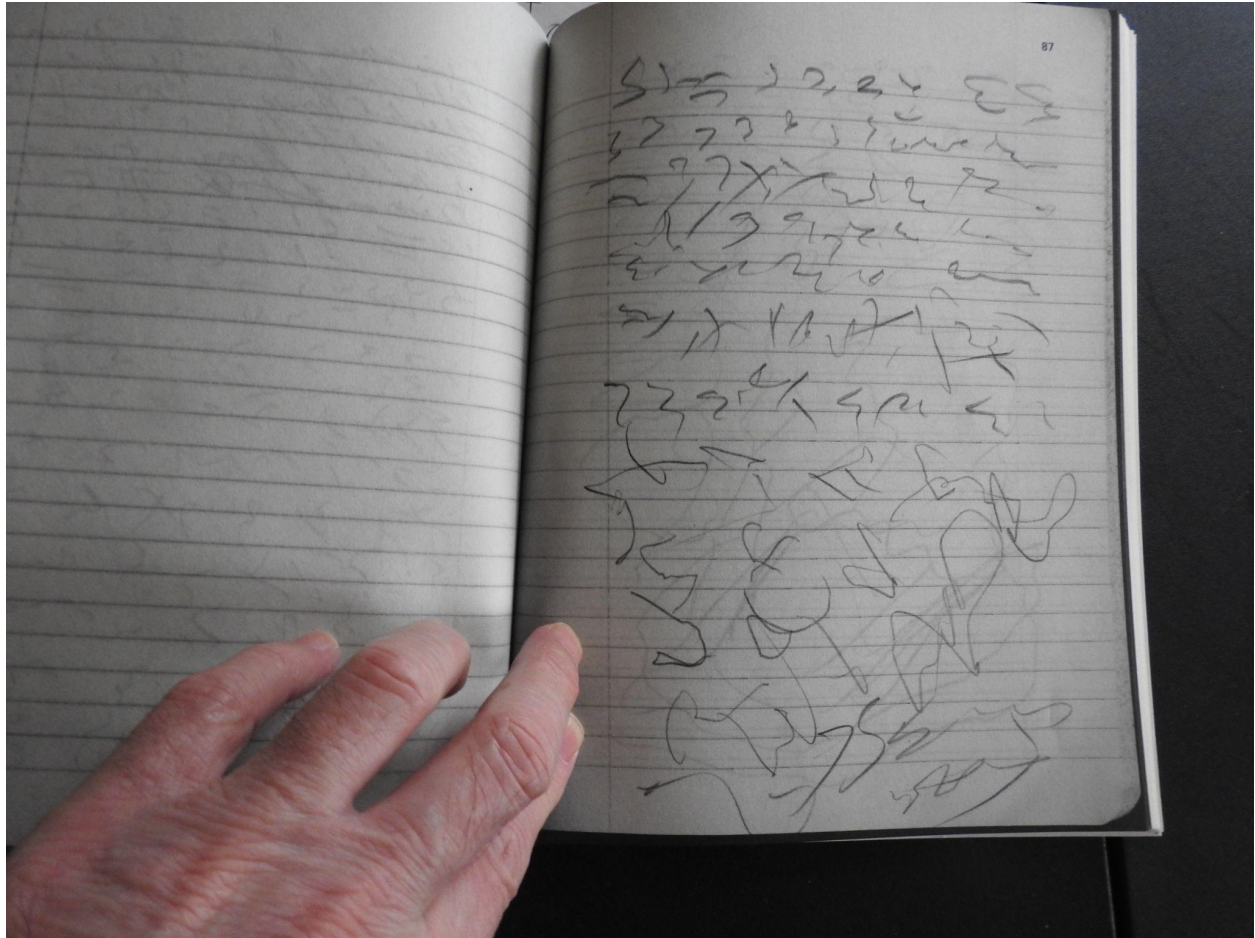
millions of spaceships or planets in the extremest
spaces — the black void itself —
filled with solid objects —

Stars flying away — never to
be reached
unless you screw up Time
itself —
a happy night of Saraswati's birthday
Goddess of learning
Queen of Sanskrit prosody
Music over the roof —
(bodies burning on the levels
of Manikamika ghat
under the head of the Smoking tower —
looking down into the Bosch-flares of
winter sick & Springtime dead
— a procession of four crying *Ram's Truth*
carrying the two foot thin corpse
stiff in colored silk —

Blake on the wall last week,
eyes closed frowning on my
insults to the Professor
I skipped in the room ashamed & fluttered
my face with my fingers —
Tonight the white mask face eyes now closed
to listen to the music with a
faint smile
of wonder at the Perfection
Bullshit Singing
patted with tablas, droning harmonium,
voice skipping after midnight
its ni ni ni's of Minnie Springtime
Paganini-staged in Advance
by the great Slap of Creation
Wherever it happened & wherever it's
going it's here right now —

"lacking in substantiality"

[Faint handwritten notes, mostly illegible due to fading.]



From an email exchange with Marco Giovenale:
Jim Leftwich
Mon, Dec 13, 2021, 6:38 AM
to Marco

The 3 pages of desemantized handwriting are part of a poem. The whole thing was handwritten in a notebook. The title of the poem is Saraswati's Birthday. Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom, and nature, represents the free flow of wisdom and consciousness. The section of the poem leading into the desemantized handwriting goes as follows:

Mustard plants & wheat ripening
Across the river from Ramnagar
by slow poled boat
on blue seeming water ----
Skeletal boatman turbaned
on head & loins
hollow armed
one anna received at the shore stall
under the umbrella, sleek lazy
Man-concessionaire acceptant
of the angry coin ----
Eee Eeee ---- Ee Ee Ee

At the end of the line of 'e's the improvised squiggles begin.
After 3 pages of desemantized handwriting, Ginsberg's poem emerges into 3 pages of visual poetry which ends in the image of a tightrope over a void (p. 164).
On p.165 he writes, again in verse:

a happy night of Saraswati's birthday
Goddess of learning
Queen of Sanskrit prosody
Music over the roof
[...]
Tonite the white mask face eyes now closed
to listen to the music with a
faint smile
of wonder at the Perfection
Bullshit singing

Desemantized writing exists within the complete potential of all writing systems as a necessary and inevitable outcome.

As the human species writes and continues to write it will from time to time arrive at the practice of desemantized writing.

Imagine if you will for a long moment or two the pursuit and/or practice of a nontheistic mysticism based in the nuanced alterations of consciousness experienced by the poet as he or she imperils the selfmultitude between their languages under pressure. The poet might pass through the eye of a camel into and through the Need for our universal minds within which reside the extremities of desemantized writing. We find this exact transgression of supraconscious nonspeculation in the journals of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg.

The sentence refuses until it doesn't flex recuperated deployment of juxtaposed sequences (invisible fluidity building alluvial meaning-streams): when you walk in the same stream twice, walk with your feet. Bondo lingo nontomorrow in vitro. When writing hyperturbational declarative sentences like this one, I. You get the idea, no doubt, but not because I have given it to you.

I want to pause and think, looking at the speed of light, thinking as slowly as I can, I promise, sitting down, and I want you to want the same or similar for yourself. Reading takes its stand sitting down, fiercely zazen insurrectionist of the primal letterspirit the primordial spiritletters hesychasm tzerufe otiot hollowed beat thigh name, read it twice, cut it once.

From fact to facet.

Atomic fact to subatomic facet?

No.

A facet is a fact.

Box of thinking.

Box of thoughts.

Box of memories.

Box of lacunae.

Box of misguided principles.

Box of misleading premises.

From facet to fact.

The cut-up method desemantizes writing, but only partially, provisionally, temporarily.

"Resemantizes" is perhaps a more accurately secure plateau, but it is neither more efficient nor less confusing than "asemic".

What happens if we permit the cut-up method to produce a subletteral noisic poetry? We find ourselves one step deeper into the dark desemantized woods. Beneath the dimly lit signage of our dreaming desires...

Permutations in the service of desemantized writing display as their central exhibit the twin barriers of grammar and syntax. Bollards between the berms, thousand year floods, dust devils, landslides, wildfires, sandstorms, triple digit temperatures for nine days in a row, major roads closed in the Mojave Preserve, punctuated by parsecs and pulsars, photograph what you think, not what you see, write what you want to know.

Do what thou wilt.
What thou wilt do.
Thou wilt do what.
Wilt do what thou.
Wilt thou what do.
Do wilt thou what.
What do wilt thou.
Thou what do wilt.

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